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Marsh? What Marsh?

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SPECIAL TO THE CLIPPER

It's called many things by many people: the Town Forest, the Mayflower Street Conservation Area, the pond off Mayflower Street, the North Hill Golf Course Pond and probably other generic descriptions as well. But the real name for that lovely pond between the golf course greens and the Mayflower Street parking area is North Hill Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary. 'So,' you might ask, 'where's the marsh?'

Good question!

The 'marsh' is the once name for what is now an irregularly shaped pond many in Duxbury have hiked around for years. It wasn't always even a marsh; it started life as a brook. The brook was dammed years ago to provide both power for a sawmill and year-round water for the local farms that existed where golf balls are whacked today. The brook's dammed waters flowed out over the surrounding lowland and created the marsh. Ducks and geese decided it was a perfect place to raise their young and duck hunters with shotguns soon followed. In the 1920's a group of local sportsmen purchased the marsh for hunting waterfowl and called themselves the Trustees of the North Hill Marsh Trust. Fifty years later they evidently lost interest in shooting and deeded their 90 acres of reservoir, marsh and 30 acres of upland to the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

But in between their acquisition and the deeding a local cranberry grower in 1940 built a bigger dam backing up more water and the marsh became the pond we walk around today on the Pond Loop Trail. In the 1880's Duxbury was fortunate to have Frederick B. Knapp as a citizen. He was headmaster of the Powder Point School for Boys, was an early and ardent conservationist and an active voice in town politics. For many years he urged the town fathers to set aside land for a forest. Finally, in 1929, they did, purchasing a large tract of upland pine woods along Mayflower Street that in 1933 was named in his honor, the Frederick B. Knapp Town Forest.

But Knapp Forest is just one of the parcels that make up the huge area now called North Hill Marsh. Much of the land roughly bounded by Mayflower, Tremont and West Streets belongs to either the Town of Duxbury or Mass Audubon and is open for public use. In 1986 town meeting members listened carefully to a Conservation Commission recommendation to purchase 120 more acres in the North Hill area and voted in favor of the article. That land is Waiting Hill Preserve and it protects a large part of Duxbury's precious aquifer. It takes its name from the hill where early Duxbury wives and children would wait and watch for their loved-one's clipper ships to appear on the horizon. Back then the lands east of Waiting Hill were cleared fields and from Waiting Hill's 140-foot high hilltop those women and children could see as far as Provincetown on clear days.

All the land comprising North Hill Marsh is now under a joint land management agreement between the Conservation Commission and Mass Audubon and is open from sunrise to sunset for our enjoyment. Boating, hunting, fishing, skating and trapping are not allowed nor are unauthorized motorized vehicles. Fires, woodcutting and gathering are forbidden as are dumping or littering. There is one small area of Conservation Commission Land where Boy Scout camping is allowed but prior permission is always needed.

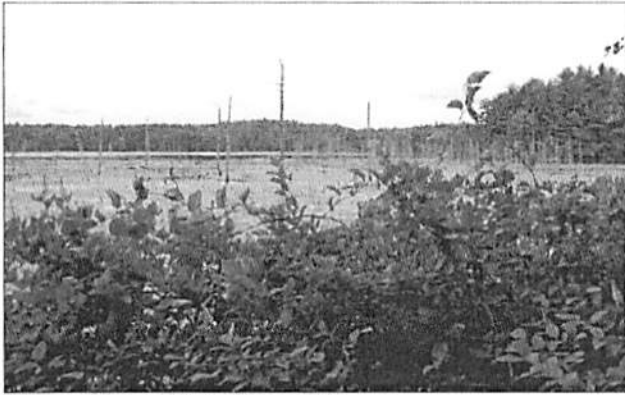
In addition to the main parking area access on Mayflower Street, trails can also be entered from behind First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church on Tremont Street near Town Hall, from a trail beginning at the intersection of Tremont and Harrison Streets and from a small parking area a quarter mile in on Modoc Street. There are also challenging trail bike paths assessable from the gate at the end of Teakettle Lane.

A second loop trail can be reached from a connector path behind First Parish Church. It's called the Kettle Hole Loop for the many nearby kettle holes left by retreating glaciers. One part of that trail was a Native American footpath, which later became the Old Pilgrim Trail linking Marshfield and Plymouth. In 1637 it was named Green's Harbor Path by the Plymouth Court and was probably America's first court-ordered road. (Green's Harbor was the early name given to Marshfield.) In addition to the Pond and Kettle Hole Loops many other trails wind through the combined acreage of North Hill Marsh past cranberry bogs, golfing fairways, observation decks and stands of white pine, pitch pine, oaks and red maple. Black-crowned night herons, great blue herons, great horned owls, red-tailed hawks and osprey can be seen as well as an impressive variety of ducks and geese. Black, water and garter snakes can be spotted along with snapping, painted and the rarer spotted and box turtles. Coyote, fox, white tailed deer, red and grey squirrels, chipmunks, mice, mink, opossum, raccoons, otter and fishers make their home in North Hill Marsh and many turkeys roam its woods. At least a hundred pairs of tree swallows inhabit the nesting boxes placed around the pond and wood ducks and ring-necked ducks are often seen.

North Hill Marsh is far less of a marsh now than when it was first named but it offers some of the best and most frequently

walked trails in Duxbury with views, sounds and smells to astound the senses.

So go take a hike . . . and please, bring out with you what you carry in to keep North Hill Marsh such a pristine place to walk.



The pond at North Hill "marsh".



ConservationConversation

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